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ARNO'S VALE.

A Poem,

BY

WILLIAM BRODIE.



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ARNO'S VALE.

IN Arno's Vale, beneath the mid-day sun,
The scarcely opened foliage of the trees
Shone out as smaragdite of tend'rest green,
And flowers, amidst the verdure of the fields,
Enamelled all the sward; bright crocuses
And tender lilies, sweetly scented, bloomed
Around; the wooing pigeon also made
The woodland glades resonant of his love;
And in the sky the lark poured out his song.

'Twas Spring, and Nature had just awaked her
From the long slumber of the Winter months,
And greeted with a smile returning life.

Deep in the forest, near an aged oak
Whose gnarled branches stretched out far o'erhead,
Sat Jeannie, on a slope of mossy green ;
Reclining on his elbow at her feet,
And lost in contemplation, Wilfred lay.
Silent, he scanned her face in rapt repose,
And scarcely breathed, fearing to break the dream
Of pleasure and of hope he then enjoyed ;—
Yet ever and anon his wandering looks
Would seek his Jeannie's eyes of heavenly blue,
And try to read within their depths her love,

Of which as yet he scarcely felt assured ;
And every change of countenance he marked,
Searching out, sedulous, her inmost thoughts ;
For though he saw the kindness of her smiles,
He doubted,—prone as lovers ever are
To doubts, suspicion, and to jealousy,—
If all her heart were his and his alone ;—
Nor, though he might have known her love was his
Had he but marked how when she saw him come
Her face was lighted up with silent joy,
Dared on the die to risk his hope, and ask
An answer from her truthful, loving lips.

His had been a wayward mood of life ;—
Though young, he'd wandered o'er the earth in quest

Of Fame. Had often touched the wished-for prize ;—
On touching, found it worthless ;—and, wrathful,
Mocked at his life, and held all good to be
But the creation of men's brains o'erwrought,—
A thing without substance, non-existing :
Nor found he any pleasure in his life
Till Fortune, in a kindly mood one day,
Did him to knowledge of his Jeannie bring.
Then from his eyes the scales of unbelief
Fell suddenly, and the frozen current
Of his heart's blood no longer stagnated,
But with new life inspired, coursed in his veins
With all the wild excess of streams in Spring,
When, from the iron bands of Winter loosed,
Their headlong torrents, madly rushing, bear

All barriers down that do obstruct their paths.
He loved ; and love had given life new charms,
To him before unknown. He dreamt of her,—
Thought of his Jeannie's love all the day long,
And loving her, he loved all he saw,
Believed in human goodness and in truth ;—
Was glad ;—in fact was quite a changed man.

Thus they sat loving on the slope of grass,
And o'er sweet Arno's Vale they smiling looked,
Wrapt in an ecstasy of joy and hope ;
Yet with some secret fear their joy was mixed,
For he who bears about with him his wealth,
And carries all his treasure where he goes,
Fears thieves in every brake and every hedge,

And trembles lest some mischance befall him
On the way.

Then Wilfred rose, and speaking
In a caressing, gentle voice, he said :—
“ Charm of my life, sweet flower from Eden culled,
“ Ere Paradise was lost,—my Jeannie dear,—
“ Now first I think I know thou lovest me,
“ And how can I repay this thy great love
“ To me unworthy ? How ever make me
“ In deserts thy equal ? I who never
“ Up to this time have slightest pleasure found
“ In anything that men do value most !
“ I who regarded life as a dark vale
“ Bedewed with human tears, and bearing grief
“ As its sole crop ; and I did deem that grief

“ Was wedded so to all estates of life,
“ That sorrow followed ever on our steps
“ From the first moment when the puling babe
“ Wept for his mother’s breast, until, worn out
“ And sinking to his grave an aged man,
“ He did bemoan his affections wasted,
“ And all his aspirations after good,
“ Nipt in the bud and chilled. But now I see
“ That I had judged amiss,—that woman’s love,
“ When purely won, is the great prize of life.
“ To thee I owe this,—my greatest knowledge ;
“ And when I look on thy dear face, my love,
“ I feel fresh life instilled into my veins.
“ For thee alone on earth I live, sweet child,—
“ Reality of all my boyhood’s dreams.—

“ Yes, I do love thee, girl, with the strong love

“ That in my heart has been for years pent up,

“ And now bursts forth with all the vehemence

“ It has acquired by time.” He paused, and looked

At Jeannie, then in his arms clasping her

He kissed the glistening tear away that stood

In her bright eye, and, to her kneeling, said :—

“ Dear love, to thee myself I will devote,

“ And all my life shall to embellish thine

“ Be spent ; and it shall be my fondest task

“ To make thee happy, and thy life one dream

“ Of bliss, and I will teach thee all I know

“ That is of worth, and guide thy steps from that

“ Which, by experience, I have learnt to be

“Fruitless and bad ; and thou shalt be to me
“The one and only pleasure of my life.
“Blest be the hour when first I learnt thy love !
“And thou dost love me,—and hast given to me
“Thy heart of hearts ? Speak but one word to say
“That I do own that most priceless treasure ;
“Speak, though thy trembling lips may dread to tell
“What I so fain would hear, and whisper Yes !”
Then rising from one knee he seized her hands,
And, peering in her face, bent all his strength
To keep th’ impatience of his nature down,
Until the mantling blushes crimsoned o’er
His Jeannie’s face, and, with a sob, her head
Fell on his shoulder, and a whispered “Yes”
Stole from her lips.

The sun was in the West,—
The heavy-laden bee, returning, hummed
As, on his homeward way, to rest he sped,—
The cooing dove sang gently to his mate,
To soothe her cares of new maternity,—
The primroses and cowslips drooped their heads,
And, as they closed them for the night's repose,
Sent out their grateful incense of the day,
And perfumed all the balmy evening's air.
No zephyr even stirred a single leaf;
The purple mountain-tops were tipped with gold,
Reflecting back the setting sun's bright rays;

The valleys, all in sombre shadow wrapt,
Seemed new, and fresh fantastic forms to take,
As the declining day cast shades around.

Locked arm in arm Wilfred and Jeannie went
On their way home, happy ; and, as they walked,
Spoke in soft whispers of their future plans ;
How they would live from the gay world apart,
And spend their lives in some secluded spot,
Where they might watch in love the bursting Spring,
And trace, through all its varied course, the year ;
And when by chance they lifted up their eyes,
The glories of the view struck both with awe,
And, turning round to look upon the scene,
Their eyes met, and in that one glance they saw

Into each other's souls, and read the thoughts
Of pure and holy love that dwelt therein ;
Then, as if by some hidden force impelled,
Their too-full hearts welled out into their eyes
In tears of joy ; and, pressing to his breast
His not unwilling bride, Wilfred broke forth :—
“ How fair and comely is this world of ours,
“ Which I did scorn before I better knew
“ To prize it, and to take pleasure in
“ Its many beauties, which thou, dear love,
“ By thy bright qualities, hast taught me now
“ To value as I ought. Oh ! lovely spouse,
“ My failing utterance doth bid me stop
“ From telling thee the charms which o'er my life
“ Thy love has cast ; and for interpreter

“Of what I feel and fain would say,
“Must trust to the self-teaching of thy heart
“To read my thoughts aright! But look around—
“How suited to our loves is this sweet spot!”
Wilfred and Jeannie had their troth exchanged,
And, ere the night had past, Jeannie’s father,
Pleased at her choice, had given his consent;
And thus in courtship passed the months of Spring,
Until the Summer time had come.

Far up fair Arno's Vale there stands a Church
Of high antiquity. Its heavy porch,
With woodbine and with roses overgrown,
Is suited well to match the rustic taste
In which the house of worship has been built.
Large spreading trees o'ershadow the grave-yard,
Full of old tombstones, roughly hewn and cut,
And here and there a sculptured monument,
Of ancient date, looks proudly down on them.
All 'round the lofty mountain ranges rise,
Closing the valley in. A rustling brook,
Near to the Church, brawls in its rocky bed,

And dashes o'er a small cascade into
A dark-green pool beneath—the loved resort
Of all the funny tribe, who, free from fear
Of man, disport them in the crystal flood.
And in the belfry's ivy-covered height
Flocks of small birds build their frail nests,
Rearing in full security their young.

Down from the Church the road, hedged in with May
And poplar trees, close by the stream does lead,
And, following all its tortuous course,
Winds through the vale, until an ancient bridge
Bears it across a steep and narrow way
To the rude country inn, with swinging sign,
The usher of the village and its pride.

Hard by the bridge a cottage stood, embowered
In roses and in blooming jessamine,
Which o'er its front had crept until you scarce
Could see the windows through their foliage thick.
Its garden, small, well stocked with flowers, stretched out
In sunny slope, down to the silv'ry stream,
Bearing the promise of a heavy crop
To come,—for then the Summer was still young.
From out its open casement laughter rang:
'Twas Jeannie's wedding-day! and, dressed in white,
More beauteous than the budding rose in Spring,
She waited, with an anxious, throbbing heart,

The distant ringing of the marriage-bell,
To call her to the Church; and all the friends
Of her young school-girl days stood 'round, in white,
A group of blooming maidens. In the hall
Her aged father sat, well pleased to know
His daughter happy, and yet feeling sad
That all those smiles he had so fondly loved—
Those winning ways and gentle sweetnesses
That ever in past times his Jeannie made
The stay and comfort of his waning years—
Were now to fly forever from his hearth,
And that another was to claim as his
The child his widowed heart had cherished;
And as he mused, the tears coursed down his cheeks.
Still he was proud that he who'd gained her love

Was no unworthy match, but one who stood
Foremost among his fellows—a soldier
Of bright promise.

Whilst thus alone he sat
His daughter came, radiant with smiles of joy,
To kiss him, and to say that now it was
Full time they left, and went then to the Church,
As all the company before had gone,
And waited for their coming there; that she
Was ready. But, as she spoke, her father's
Look of deep sorrow touched her, and her heart,
Before so gay, felt heavy when she thought
Of all his tender love in bygone years;
And kneeling down she took his hand in hers,
Then pressed it to her lips and said: "Father,

“That I have ever loved with all the love
“Of my young girl’s fond heart, and still do love
“And cherish, think not that, although I wed
“The man who has my woman’s love entire,
“I ever can forget thee, father kind.”

And on his knees she hid her face, and wept
In heavy grief; but he, soothing her, said:

“Arise, my child. That we should sorrow much
“To part, is right; yet that it must be so
“I’ve felt since first I saw thy form assume
“The grace of womanhood; and I, my child,
“Do know full well thy heart’s affections kind;
“For as no mother’s fostering care thou knew’st,
“My rough wit has, by tending thee, been brought
“To woman’s softness. Go, and my blessing

“Shall accompany thee in all thy ways.

“Arise : I do resign my treasure,—yes,

“My all,—to better keeping than my own.”

To the old Church then hand in hand they went,

Where Wilfred waited for them at the porch,

And, leading Jeannie to the altar up,

He plighted to her there his faith, as she

To him, with perfect confidence and hope,

In full assurance of their mutual love.

Jeannie had been married to her Wilfred,
And three short years of happiness had spent
With him, blest in her love with two sweet babes,
When through the land there was the cry of war,
And England's stalwart sons went forth to fight.
Then Wilfred rose, and unto Jeannie said,
That as a soldier he must join himself
To those who for their country's cause now went
To battle on a distant savage shore ;
And to his words she gave a ready ear ;
For, though she loved him better than her life,
She would have rather seen him die than hear

Men lightly of his honor speak,
Or say of him that she did love, that he,
Lost in uxorious pleasures, had forgot,
In the soft lap of luxury, to wield
His sword, or guide, as in days past, his men
To victory. Then on his neck her head
She leaned, and, weeping, told him of her love,
But said that she would willingly give up
Her life to add more honor to his name,
Which was the cherished guerdon of her heart.
And then she told him how, when he was gone,
She'd to her father's house go back, until
He came again to bless her with his love.
And he was proud of her devotion true,
As she of him, admiring her with all

The fondness he had ever felt since first
He gained her simple heart in Arno's Vale.
“ Best of women, kindest of wives,” he said,
“ When first I knew thee I did doubt if thou
“ Couldst e'er have won me from my wayward self,
“ And oft I doubted, as I saw thy smile,
“ Lest 'neath its seeming kindness falseness lurked ;
“ And then thou taughtest me, by simple love
“ And self-denying sacrifice, a truth
“ That I in vain had sought for in the world,—
“ Searching the topmost branches for the fruit
“ Which in the middle branch is found the best,—
“ That to be loved, a man must love in truth.
“ But thou hast taught me more than this,—that love
“ Can sacrifice itself ;. and with thy love,

“ As with a talisman, secure I go ;
“ And though to leave thee is my greatest grief,
“ Thy words have consolation yielded me,
“ For, if I fall, I know that I shall live
“ With thee embalmed in thy sweet memory.”

The sky with angry clouds was overcast,
And down in torrents poured the pelting rain ;
The yellow stream rushed wildly past the house ;
And the low moaning winds made symphony
With the loud thunder rumbling far away
In the lone hills. The drooping cattle sought
Beneath the leafless trees a shelter slight ;
The weary traveller, bedrenched, looked round,
Hoping to find some hospitable roof
To shield him from the fury of the storm.
The shades of night had just begun to cast
Their heavy mantle dark o'er all the vale.

Close by a blazing fire sat Jeannie, sad ;
A careless infant gambolled at her feet ;
Another, younger still, played on her knees,
And as he tried her notice to attract
A passing smile lit up her countenance,
Then o'er her face the look of sorrow crept
Again ; and as her father saw her so
He sighed, but spake no word, for he was sad
As well as she ; and when he read the news
Of battles won he often feared for her,
Lest in the lists of wounded of those fights
The name of Wilfred should appear. This day

His fears had proved too just, and he did dread
That Jeannie now a widow near him sat.

'Twas in the time when on the Black Sea shores
War bitter raged between the Czar and those
Who fought for right against the right of force ;
And in the pages of the day there was
The tale of a great fight by Inkermann,
In which a handful of brave men had fought
And conquered all the legions of the North,
Doing there deeds of bravery beyond
Whate'er by ancient poets has been sung.

The first gray light of morning glimmering shone
Through the thick mist that lay upon the earth,
When on the sentry's ear there broke the sound

As of the measured tramp of armed men
And the dull rumbling of artillery
Advancing to the spot on which he stood.
But though he heard, he could discern nothing,
For all around him hung a heavy fog.
Then suddenly the vapour rolled away,
And in the valley at his feet he saw
The dark-grey columns of the enemy
In densest masses close together packed,
And scarce could give the signal of attack
Before they rushed to seize the post he held.
And then the struggle dire for life began
Between the Russian and the British troops ;—
For on that morning England almost lost
The glory of her name ; but every man

Felt that he fought the battle of his age,
And rather had resolved to die than yield.
Then came relief, and France helped England's sons
To win the day.

Wilfred fought in it,—

Had bravely borne the onset, and, wounded,
Lay uncared for in a vile, wretched hut,
Where the foul reeking odours of the sick
And the low groans of dying men made death
More sad. But the remembrance of his home,
And the kind, gentle love that there he knew
Awaited him, gave life such charms that he
O'ercame his sorrows, and, with death struggling,
Brought in his need such force of love to help
As saved his life. And then a woman blest

Nursed him, and staunched with care his bleeding wounds
She was one of that band of women brave
Who left their families and hearths to tend
The sick,—women that every age must praise
For all that they endured in that sad time,
When war and plague made havoc in the ranks
Of Britain's troops, and brave men quailed to see
The flower of England's chivalry struck low.

How oft had Wilfred in his lonely tent,
When the dread bugle-horn called all to arms,
Remembered his love, and thought of Jeannie
Far away,—and of those sweet faces young,
That in his happier days had been his joy.
And when roused up from a deep sleep to fight

For life and honour in the valley dark
Of Inkermann, he grieved to think that he
Might never see his Jeannie dear again :—
He yet recalled to mind her noble love ;
And he knew well that she who loved him would
Far rather that unblemished his fair name
To her he left, than even that he should
Return unscathed, dishonoured, to his home ;
For women love in men great bravery,
As men in women modesty most prize.
And as he thought of her and of her love
His soul was steeled to deeds of bravery,
And fearless down the mountain's side he charged.
Yet death he feared not, for he oft had seen
Men die,—some on the field of battle, some

On the bed of sickness stretched, and some
Of lingering wounds and festering, cankered sores,—
Had looked on corpses newly slain, and seen
The last sad smile of love around the lips
To play, as if in the dread hour of death
The sweet remembrances of by-gone days
Rose up to charm away all pain and grief,
And left imprinted on the breathless clay
The stamp of sweet tranquility alone.

The day before the fight of Inkermann
He had received from her a letter long,
In which she told him of her household cares,
And that she felt so lone without his love
To comfort her ; and how the Winter nights,

Dreary with howling winds and drizzling sleet,

Impressed her sadly as she looked upon

Her blazing fire, and thought of him away,

And suffering in the cold Crimean wastes ;

And then she ended thus in loving strain :—

“ Dearest husband, thou dost know as well as I

“ How my poor foolish heart repines to be

“ Thus left alone, and I need scarcely say

“ That it does ever yearn for thee, because

“ Thou know'st full well my love ; but yet I feel

“ Thine honour as mine own, which I would keep

“ Untarnished from a single speck of blame ;

“ And though my heart does bleed to think that thou

“ Must from me absent be for some time yet,

“ I still do wish that thou shouldst win the praise

“ Of men ; and then I dream of thy return,
“ And, dreaming, press my baby to my breast,
“ And sigh to have thee at my side that I
“ Might lavish on thee all the love that burns
“ Within my woman’s heart for thee,—a love
“ Beyond the mother’s for her sucking child.”

And as he read this letter from his wife
He felt that all that he could do to add
Fresh lustre to his name would fall far short
Of the deservings of his wife ; and when,
After the battle past, he wounded lay,
And thought at length the hour of death was come,
He dreamt of Jeannie and her love, happy
That if he died he died for love of her
Who first had given her love entire to him.

Wilfred was better, and at Scutari,
An invalid,—one among many sick,—
Yet he could wander with slight help along
The cliffs, and feast his eyes on the bright view
Of the fair Princes' Isles, that seem to be,
Gems of the azure deep, and turn his gaze
To Stamboul's thousand minarets and domes,
And look upon the virgin's tower ; and oft
At dusk he'd sit upon the battlement
To hear the tales of ancient times as they
Were told to him by one well verséd in
The lore of all that coast, whilst on his ear

Would break in sad and solemn symphony
The Muezzin at dusk, or later still
The boatman's chant, as, coming cheerful
From his daily work, he sang rude music
To the plashing of his oar.

Right in the centre of the stream where meet
The waters of the Bosphorus and those
That flow along the Golden Horn, and where
The sea of Marmora does take its rise,
There stands upon a solitary rock
A tower, washed by the waves on every side,—
And story says that in that tower a maid
Of royal lineage, in days long past,
Was kept a prisoner because she loved,

And that she there did pine away her life
In thinking of her love, nor feared t' avow
The passion of her heart, although she knew
That he she loved could never see her more,
But had been forced to fly t' escape the wrath
Of her fierce father;—and the poets sing
That he, true to his plighted troth, did die
Fighting a rebel in the rebels' camp,
Nor ever let his fancy swerve from her
That he had sworn to love in youthful days;—
And that when he did die, a pigeon, white
As is the driven snow on Ida's Mount,
Flew to the tower, and, perching on the breast
Of the poor prisoner, there fluttered out
His life in love upon her bosom fair.

And Wilfred saw the feast of Ramazan,
When all the Moslems fast the day, but make
At night a high carousal, lighting up
The darkness with bright lamps, when every mosque
Within the wide extended Paynim rule
Has its tall minarets with lanterns hung ;—
And Stamboul sparkles with its myriad lights
Like a bright fairy scene reflected in
The placid waters of the Golden Horn,
And tells its beauties thus twice o'er, as if
It were a city by enchantment raised.
And then the Friday after Bairam came.

The Golden Horn with gay caïques was full,
And Stamboul sent her motley crowd to spend
Their day at Europe's famous waters sweet.
The ships were clad in all their best, bedecked
With flags. And fair Circassian beauties there
Were seen, let out from the Hareem to taste
For once the pleasures of this human life
Beneath the guardianship of swarthy men,
And sat in joyous circles on the grass,
Dressed out in Ferejees of gaudy silk,
Watching the dance of gipsy girls as they
Glided around and bent their supple forms
In cadence to their native music wild.
And near them sat in solemn groups the men,
Smoking in gravity their long chiboukes,

Or quaffing coffee out of slender cups.

Whilst Arab horses of the purest breed,

Richly caparisoned in cloth of gold,

Impatient pawed the ground and, snorting, neighed,

Angry that thus inactive they were kept.

And there were families besides, of Greeks,

Who, with a motley group of men from all

The regions of the earth assembled there,

Had come in search of pleasure or of gain.

Then Wilfred was ordered home,—had passed along

The Hellespont, and in Besika Bay

At anchor waited for some other sick

That from Abydos were to join them there;

And, as at eve he paced the deck, he saw

The gorgeous sunset of the East bathe all
The sea in such a flood of light that in
A mass of living fire its bosom seemed,
As the long waves upheaved its surface smooth,—
To be one lake of liquid, molten gold ;
And in the clouds, as if suspended there,
Mount Athos, sacred over all the East,
Appeared a leaden-colored cone against
The brightness of the western sky opposed ;
And Tenedos, and Mitylene, and all
The neighbouring isles and coasts embedded lay,
Like amethysts of purest hue in the
Bright waters of the flaming deep immersed.
And when, at dawn, he rose to cast a last,
Long, loving glance upon Troy's plain, he then

First knew how truthful was that ancient bard
Who sung in blindness of those scenes that now
Before him lay,—and all his soul was fired,
When o'er the waters came a barque, to see
How in each ripple of their flashing oars
The rosy tint of early dawn shone forth.

Three weeks had past, and Albion's cliffs appear,
And every heart in the vast ship beats quick
To think that it is near its home once more.
What music is there in that magic word,
That thrills through every bosom when it hears
The sacred name of Home! a name endeared
By every tie that makes life worth a care!
Who, that has ever felt a mother's love,

Can e'er forget the gentle sympathy
And tender self-devotion of her kind
Affection pure? But dearer still the love
Of woman when she gives herself to him
Who wins her heart. And Wilfred knew that he
Was waited for by one that would have given
Her life's blood willingly to smooth away
One wrinkle from his brow,—she loved him so.
And, as to England's shores he neared, he felt
As if he would have flown, if he but could,
To Jeannie, on her bosom there to rest
From all the sorrows that he had passed through
Since, eighteen months before, he left his home.
And as he thought of her the ship to him
Seemed in her course to lag; and he was sad

When night fell on them ere that they had reached
The port, although the thousand lights along
The busy coast might well have told him that
They were awaited with impatience there.
And as he looked upon the silent deep
A boat from out the darkness stole to where
They were, and hailed the ship. His heart beat quick,—
He knew not why,—yet by the lantern's light
He saw a female figure in the boat.
One look—he knew 'twas she. He felt as if
His life in a short moment's compass was
Lived o'er again, and all the past forgot.
He rushed to meet his Jeannie;—she was there!—
And, to his bosom pressing her, he kissed
Her anxious cares away, and thanked high heaven

That now he was once more near her who was
To him the only treasure of his life.
And then they went to Arno's Vale again,
To part no more.

A Serenade.

I dreamt of thee in the still of the night ;
I thought that thou, my love, wert nigh ;
And I dreamt that I walked in the pale moonlight
A rustling streamlet by.
Then I dreamt that I clasped thee to my heart,
And thou never said'st me nay ;
So we sat us down on a mossy part
Of the bank, close by the way.

And I told thee, love, of my passion strong ;
Thou smiledst so kindly on me ;
When I waked from my dream, and it was long
From the breaking of the day.

Then I rose up straight from my troubled sleep
And I wandered out in the night,
Sadly straying to where, through the darkness deep,
Thy night-lamp shone out bright ;
And I worshiped that light that told me where
My soul's own treasure slept.
But, alas ! though I knew my love was there,
In my heavy grief I wept ;
For I could not tell thee I stood below,
Nor call thee, love, down to me,

And sad, bitter tears from my heart did flow
That I could not speak to thee.

My life, love, is ebbing fast every day,
And a chill comes over my heart
Whenever from thee I'm forced away,—
It is so sad to part.
But thou, love, must charm my life back again,
And those rosy lips must kiss
Away from my heart its dull, heavy pain,
And my sorrow change to bliss ;
For my passion must find response in thine,
And thy heart, too, must burn for me
With the scorching flame that is wasting mine,
My own dearest love, for thee !

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